



Universitat d'Alacant
Universidad de Alicante

XIII JORNADES DE XARXES D'INVESTIGACIÓ EN DOCÈNCIA UNIVERSITÀRIA

**Noves estratègies organitzatives i metodològiques en la formació
universitària per a respondre a la necessitat d'adaptació i canvi**



JORNADAS DE REDES DE INVESTIGACIÓN EN DOCENCIA UNIVERSITARIA **XIII**

**Nuevas estrategias organizativas y metodológicas en la formación
universitaria para responder a la necesidad de adaptación y cambio**

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Urban interventions in a post-soviet city. An educational experience

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ABSTRACT

Is it possible to develop, in an academic context, a proposal for the urban transformation of a former industrial area into a new mixed-use neighborhood? What happens if this *brownfield* is located 3500 Km away from the place where these proposals are going to be developed, in a former soviet republic, which none of the students participants have ever visited? What's the way of explanation to show to the students about the urban and cultural differences that exist in between Alicante and Minsk? Which strategies have been developed to achieve the selected target?

This paper will show the different on-site and on-line actions developed to complete this transnational educational experience developed at the University of Alicante collaborating with the Belarusian National Technical University by 40 students attending to Urban Design 6, a theoretical-practical signature of the Degree in Architecture. Also the different proposals developed for the new urban settlement at Liahovka peninsula in the city of Minsk will be presented, linking the methodology applied to the results achieved.

Key words: Urbanism, *brownfield*, workshop, transnational, social networks.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the results of the workshop held at the University of Alicante focused on the transformation of Minsk central area. It should also be taken into consideration the difficulties of the work as it was not possible to adapt the projects to the real situation of the city. The proposals try to offer an approach from a different culture and without profoundly knowing the precise conditions of Belarusian urbanism. Nevertheless the eleven proposals described introduce a general reflection on how to deal with the urban problems of a city with the characteristics of Minsk. In other words how to deal with the reconsideration of housing density, the transformation of plentiful open spaces, the specialization of several parts of the city, the mixture of land uses and the reuse of industrial areas, among others.

The workshop was developed at the subject Urban Design (Urbanismo 6) which is in the last academic year of the Degree in Architecture. This course was directed by Prof. Pablo Martí Ciriquián and Prof. Vicente Iborra Pallarés. The five previous urbanism subjects are distributed from second year and have specific topics: urban history, public urban design, residential urban design, landscape and planning.

The sixth urbanism subject is focused on urban interventions and projects. A first short part of the semester was devoted to analyze some projects according to the classification that professor Joan Busquets offered in his book *Cities X lines* [1]. Ten approaches of urbanistic projects are defined in his dissertation: key buildings with urban synergies; large urban artifacts; minimalist projects; urban space, landscape within the city; urban projects; the revival approach; large-scale landscape projects, decentralization; urban revitalization, historic centers and/or old fabrics; the urban master plan; and experimental projects, new urban concepts. The second part of the semester was dedicated to a studio, the workshop on the central area of Minsk (Liahovka) whose results are shown in this paper. Each group has developed a proposal attached to one of the ten approaches of urbanistic projects defined by Busquets.

To achieve a certain understanding of the area by the students some academic tools were developed during the course. First of all Prof. Vicente Iborra Pallarés, from the University of Alicante, was visiting the Belarusian National Technical University for one month in Minsk as the result of a grant by TEMPO, a Erasmus Mundus European Union Grant in spring 2014. During that time he was able to experience the city of Minsk, and to learn about the soviet era urban planning. As a result of that experience a lecture about the

city of Minsk was the starting point of the design studio in Alicante. During the whole semester Prof. Vera Sysoyeva, from BNTU, was a key factor on the development of the workshop as she was our main support. Plenty of data, images and maps were provided for the development of the course, as well as the study of Minsk made by Anna Kravec [2] or the information provided by Yandex maps [3]. But maybe the most important part were the different comments from the local point of view, provided by Prof. Vera Sysoyeva directly to the students, due to a couple of on-line tools developed. Firstly we used a social network as a common communication device that students and professors could use directly to make questions, answer them and share data. Facebook as an extremely extended network was the one selected, so we created a group devoted to this workshop. Also the idea of using Facebook was that some students from the Belarusian National Technical University were also working on the same area, with similar working conditions, so they could also see what was happening in Spain and could also share opinions and data. The second on-line tool developed was a web-blog created for this signature (<https://estrategiasurbanascontemporaneas.wordpress.com/>). The target of this website was making visible the results (partial and final) of the workshop to the students of BNTU but also to the academic community of Minsk.

Finally as a result of the whole process a couple of exchange teaching experiences were developed. Firstly Prof. Vera Sysoyeva attended to the final presentation of the design studio, so she could directly express to the local professors and students from the University of Alicante her impression about their work on the city of Minsk. She also lectured the presentation titled “Minsk urban development: from the very origin to the post-soviet transition” that was extremely helpful to have a better understanding about the Belarusian context. Some months later, Prof. Pablo Marti visited the Belarusian National Technical University to present the results of this workshop studio to the Belarusian academic community in the context of the International Practice & Research Conference that happened in the city of Minsk on February 2015.

2. THE RESULTS OF THE STUDIO WORKSHOP

As it has been mentioned each one of the eleven proposals made by a group of three or four students had to be attached to one of the ten urbanistic project approaches. The five selected lines have been: key buildings with urban synergies (one proposal); large urban

artefacts (one proposal); urban space, landscape within the city (one proposal); urban master plan (one proposal); and urban projects (seven proposals).

2.1 First approach (key buildings) a proposal by Juan Carlos Canales Requena, Esther Fernández Nieto and Javier Gozábez Casanova.

This proposal is related to strategic projects and, specifically, belongs to the group of key buildings with urban strategies. In this case a new construction is proposed near the river Svislach at the end of the boulevard that connects the spit of land with the city centre. After a study of the uses and activities around the city thorough the website <http://maps.yandex.ru>, it was revealed the lack of leisure and tourist activities. Thus, it is taken the decision to devote this land to this uses. The proposed building situated in this area is a project design by BIG (BjarkeIngels Group) activity, the Amager Resource Centre that besides the inside uses, includes a ski slope in the roof [4]. The new building not only offers the ski slope, but affords a superb view of the river and the city (Fig 1). The interior includes several sport and leisure facilities. Also, the boulevard that connects to the city centre is design including more sportive and leisure areas mixed with commercial spaces and housing.

Fig 1. New river façade

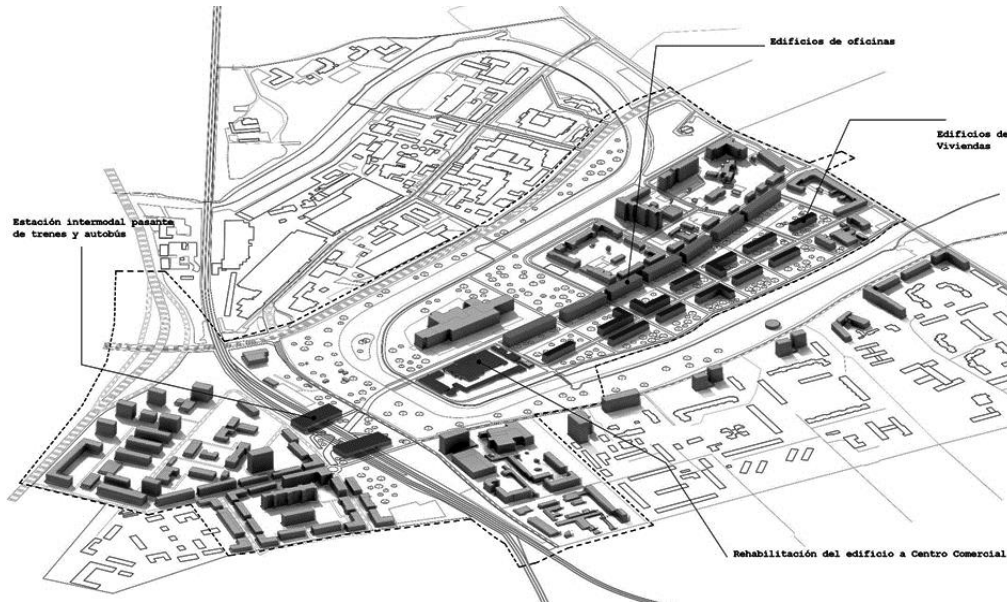


2.2 Second approach (large urban artifacts) a proposal by Pablo Tomás Castelló, Carlos Lidón García and Alberto Navarro Sánchez.

The guiding principle in this proposal is the idea of creating an urban artefact in order to generate intermodal systems and actions on infrastructures (Fig 2). In this case a new railway station and a platform bridge near the previous one is proposed with the following intentions. At a large scale two aims: on one hand to link the new station to the ring motorways of Minsk, and on the other hand to provide a new connection through a transformed boulevard to the downtown. At a district scale the objective is to establish new relations between both neighbourhoods at both sides of the river. The intermodal condition of the new buildings and platform is to exchange motor traffic, the underground network (Proletarskaya station of Avtozavodskaya line), the tramway and buses lines, bicycle and

pedestrian paths. The last issue tackled is the transformation of the street that connects the new artefact to the city centre through a redesign boulevard that includes not only residential housing but also commercial areas, offices and tertiary activities surface.

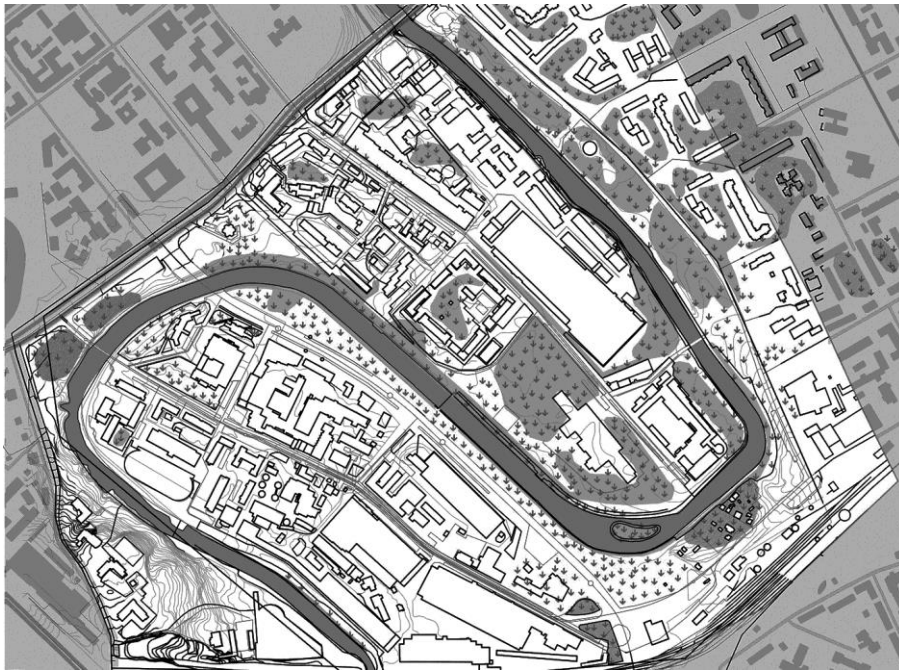
Fig 2. Aerial view of the proposal



2.3 Third approach (urban space, landscape within the city) a proposal by Enrique Climent Carlos, Rebeca Férrez Alarcón and Vicent Ibi Pascual

The starting point for consideration of this proposal is the greenery areas and landscape of the Svislach river bank, crossing Minsk from north to south (Fig 3). Although along its course the river is provided with considerable green areas on both sides, the specific land in the central area has some discontinuities of the greenery. In this context the aim of this project has a two-fold objective: first, is to assure the continuity of bank river greenery and, second, is to establish new relations between new residential areas and the river bank. Regarding green areas it is proposed to reinforce the good quality of these spaces with new trees (chestnut and plane trees). Concerning the second aspect, the green open areas between the new housing buildings, a gradation of green spaces is design, from open public spaces in the river to collective spaces and finally to private green areas related to ground floor houses or apartments.

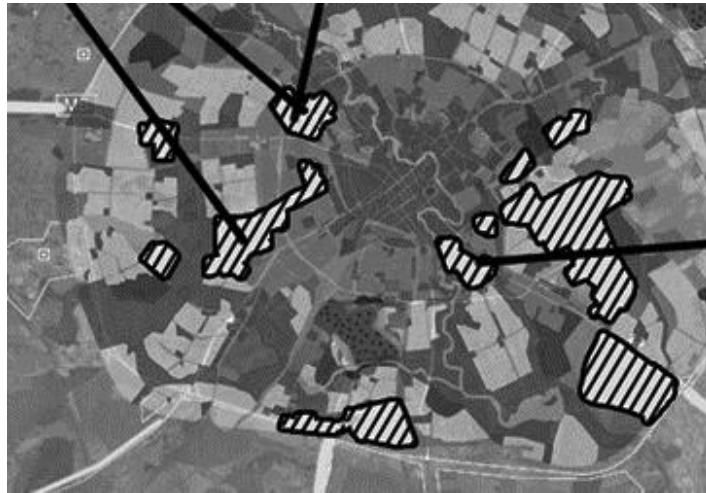
Fig 3. Green areas and river Svislach in central Minsk



2.4 Fourth approach (the urban master plan) a proposal by Belén Aguilar Quesada, María Cabañero Ferriz and Andrea Montoya Galiana.

This proposal addresses the global scale of the city and not the central area that has been the object of the previous projects. After a first analysis about the predominant uses of land in each district of Minsk, several industrial areas have been selected as areas of new developments (Fig 4). It is proposed to move the industries from the central part of the city to the outskirts and linked to the motorways that connect the rest of the country. Three different areas have been selected in order to try these changes out. The new activities and uses foreseen are a business district, a low density residential area and a sports city. The reference for the business and financial district is the Telefonica Telecommunications City in Madrid [5] and it is situated near the ring roads that connect the main road network. The other two cities, the sport and low density (detached and semidetached houses) areas are situated also well linked with the rest of the city and also near important green areas.

Fig 4. Industrial areas which activity is changed



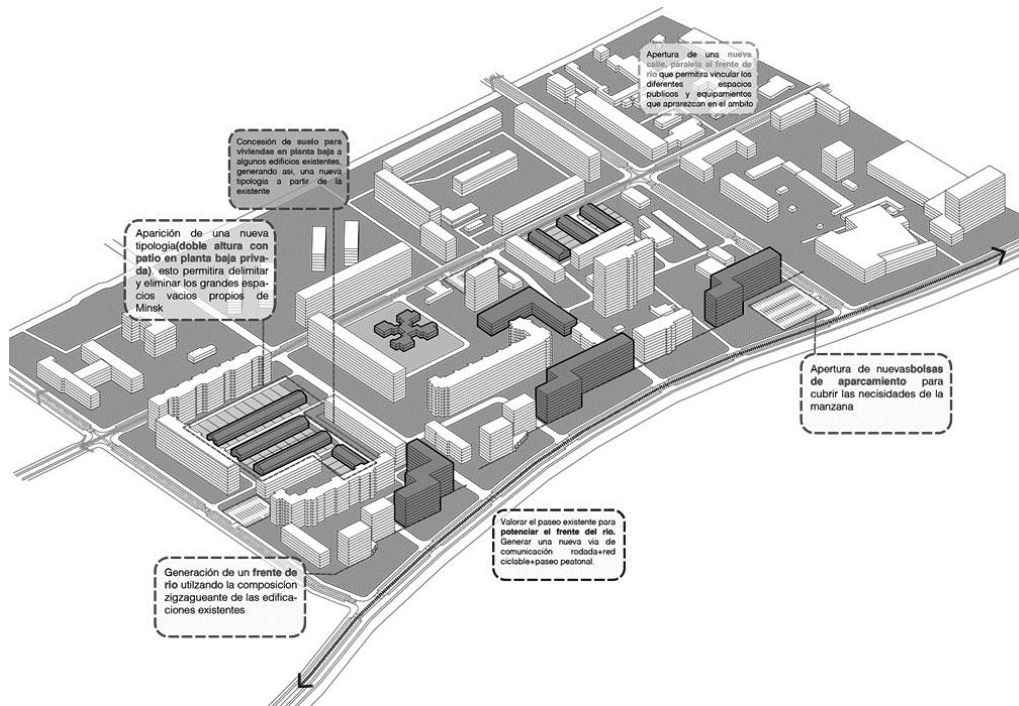
2.5 Fifth approach (urban projects).

After the conversations with some Belarusian academics working on the same area, the authors of this paper thought that maybe the focus should be placed on this specific approach with different proposals that show different ways of increasing the urban density (housing, commercial activity, public facilities...) in the central area of the city. That is why we are presenting now 7 different proposals for Liahovka area which can be classified as urban projects.

The first one (2.5.1) by José Díaz Molla, Luis Ortiz Martinez, Ignacio, Ramos Pinedo and Manuel Sempere Díaz tries to face the low density of the central area of Minsk, together with the abundance of open spaces without a clear use and position. The proposed way of raising density is not by inserting new high buildings as some of the existing residential blocks are multi-storey building of more than 10 floors. The strategy in this proposal is to raise the density and reduce open public spaces in order to leave the ones that can offer recognised open areas with an objective in the open spaces network. We can find different examples developed on the area. Firstly the occupation of several previous open spaces and privatisation others for first floor houses and leaving the rest of open spaces to become an organised network of defined spaces around the city. In this example that belongs to the front part of the river, the occupations tries to offer a façade to the river and clarify which are the entrances to the city from the riverside (Fig 5). The second example of transformation of a block is based in traditional city centre increase of constructions surface, raising existent buildings and occupying empty inner spaces, including new housing typologies. Other

considerations related to this proposal are: the reuse of old industrial areas; mixture of uses in the new transformed blocks; and new pedestrian relations among the residential districts through a new bridge that crosses river Svislach offering a cross-connection.

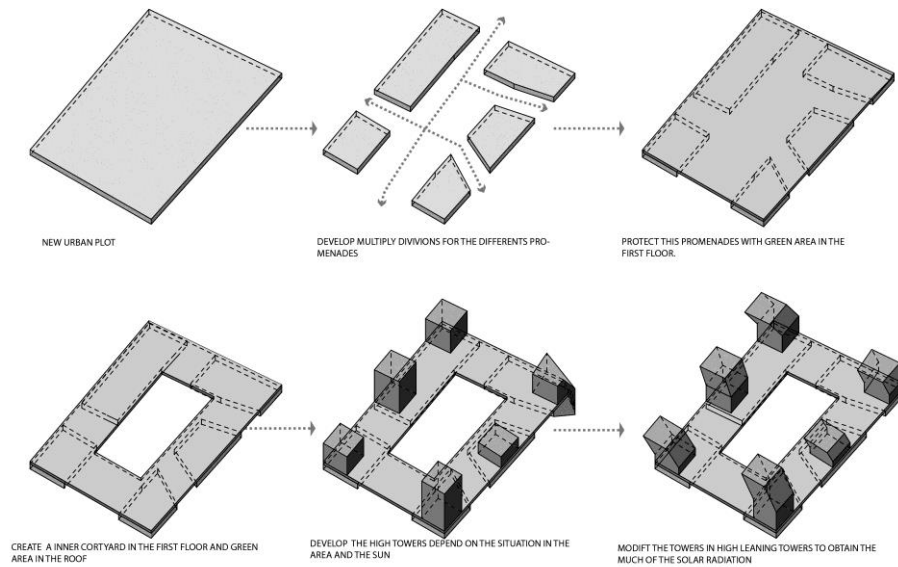
Fig 5. New residential buildings proposed



Next proposals work on both loops of the river and try to change clearly the character of the area by introducing new urban typologies, trying to maintain the existing industrial heritage when possible, and empowering the presence of the “green diameter” of Minsk.

The proposal by Soledad Andreu Medina, Irene Cortizo Jiménez y Cristina Sotos Solano (2.5.2), creates a new urban grid which tries to increase the links between the adjacent areas by revisiting the idea of mat building (Fig 6). These “new” typologies would be placed in plots that at the same time re-create the image of “corridor” street, lost in the outskirts of the city but still present in the central areas. The new urban structure will provide also a protected pedestrian itinerary in the ground floor to preserve the activity on the streets during winter time.

Fig 6. Diverse new urban plots for the area

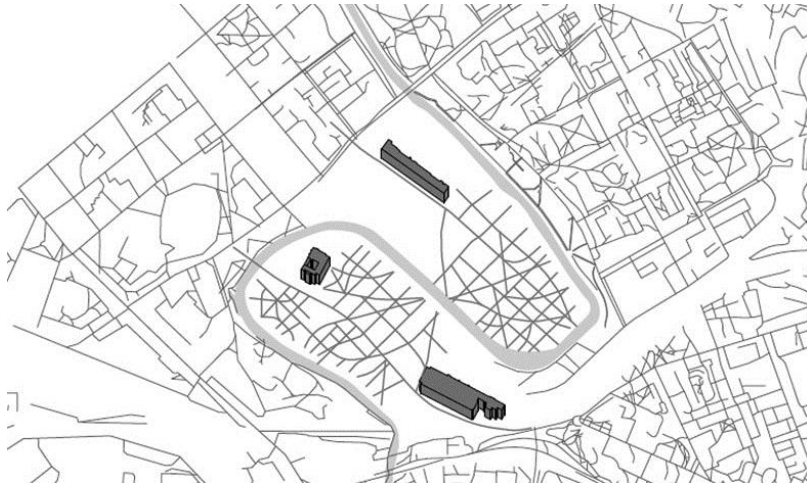


Coming from our Mediterranean understanding of the city the urban characteristics of the former plots from the Stalin era were really interesting, as they could show an example for a possible hybrid in between our different approach to the city. That is why four of our student groups took them as a starting point for their work. Two of them try to create a new urban plot for the area while the other two propose modifications (extending, extruding, scaling or cutting) of the original ones.

To start with those whom propose something “new” for the area, on the proposal by Mercedes Muela Ripoll, Soledad Rico Vidal and Sonia Torres Galvañ (2.5.3), we can find the idea of trying to mix two of the urban patterns present in Minsk. The first is, once again, the street atmosphere from the city center. The second one is the presence of those “desire lines” (Fig 7) in the city (those made by the man but not by the urban planners) that we can find at grass or snow (human footprints). They believe that the Stalin era blocks give a possible answer to these two realities, let’s say a more urban (and serious) exterior and a free use of interior parts, but are there any other possibilities?

They try to answer to this question by proposing two new urban typologies (patio and block) which solve a mixture in between a orthogonal grid and the free pedestrian movement created by the presence of the bridges and the urban facilities (existing and new ones). Using them they create a more dense area respecting some of the former industrial heritage.

Fig 7. Desire lines (existing and proposed)



These “desire lines” can be found also on the proposal by Alfonso Melero Beviá, Ruben Martínez Sanchís and Rafael Miralles Armñana (2.5.4). In this case there is not presence of an orthogonal grid so the adaptive streets are based on the different movements on the area. Links with the surrounding areas are improved and a new loop (public transport one) based on the existing tramway is introduced to connect the whole area (including the new train station) with the rest of the city. The result is a complex grid (Fig 8) solved by the presence of two urban typologies which provide not only a varied public space but also a new urban skyline for the area.

Fig 8. Proposal for the area



The next two proposals, as said before, try to work on the area introducing different variations of the former urban blocks. The first one by Beatriz Antón Urrios, José Miguel Asencio Asencio and Jaime Simón Hernández (2.5.5) starts thinking about how important is the green diameter for the city, not only as a real green lung, but mainly as a recreational area which concentrate the city life during spring and summer time. So again as a consequence of coming from a really dense and livable city during the whole year they try to create a new “winter diameter” in the area which could attract urban life during cold weather, and that could also provide a new experience of the city by crossing different atmospheres (natural vs. urban) while using it. As a result, using these diamond blocks which are in fact variations of the existing ones in the area, they provide urban central areas linked to the main streets, plus “natural” zones as an empowering of the green diameter (Fig 9).

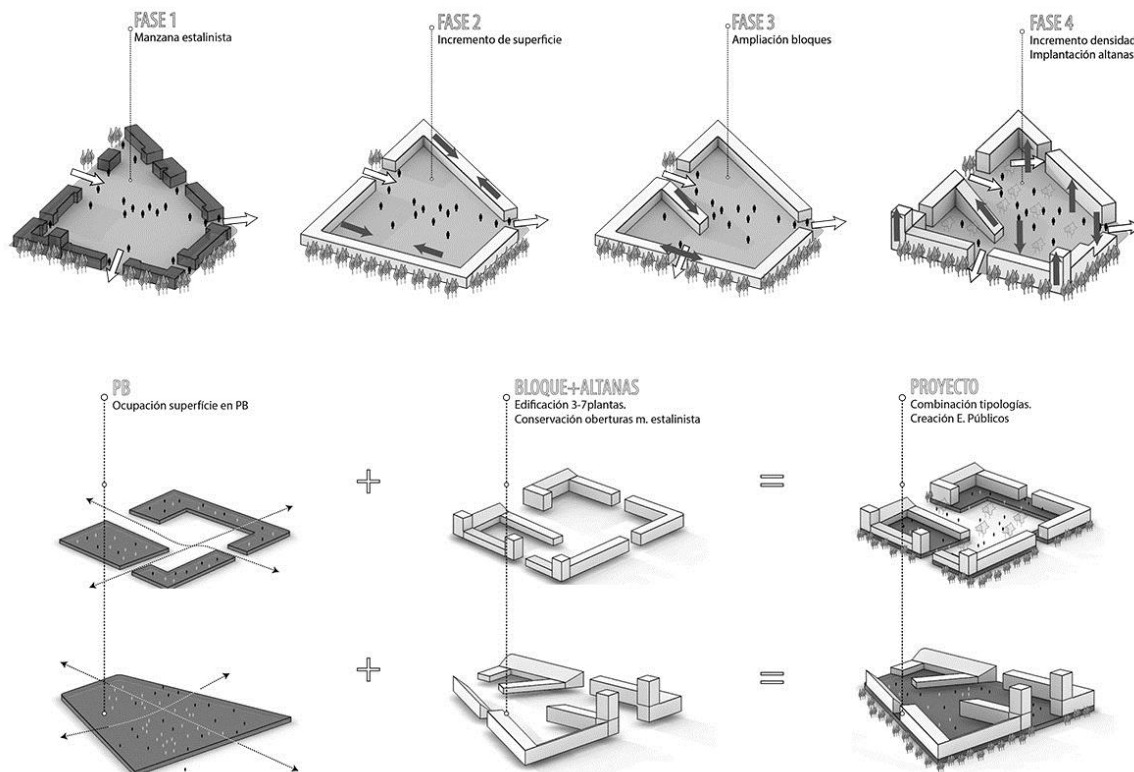
Fig 9. Overall view of the model



The second one by Carolina Díaz de Argandoña Araujo, Raquel plaza González y Rosa Villaescusa Alfaro (2.5.6) focus its interest on the connections to the neighborhoods on East and West and provide a strong new character to the green diameter linking it to the existing industrial buildings as a buffer area for them. The urban experience of the existing Stalin era blocks is the origin of their proposal. They believe that it is possible to introduce some modifications to the former one but not as a result of an endless extrusion and scaling as it is happening at the outskirts of the city (Fig 10). So they provide a possible densification process closing some of the existing openings, creating new parts of the blocks in the inner yards and adding a new version of the characteristic “altanas” that could be found at the city center. Also they provide different possibilities for the using of the interior space of the blocks

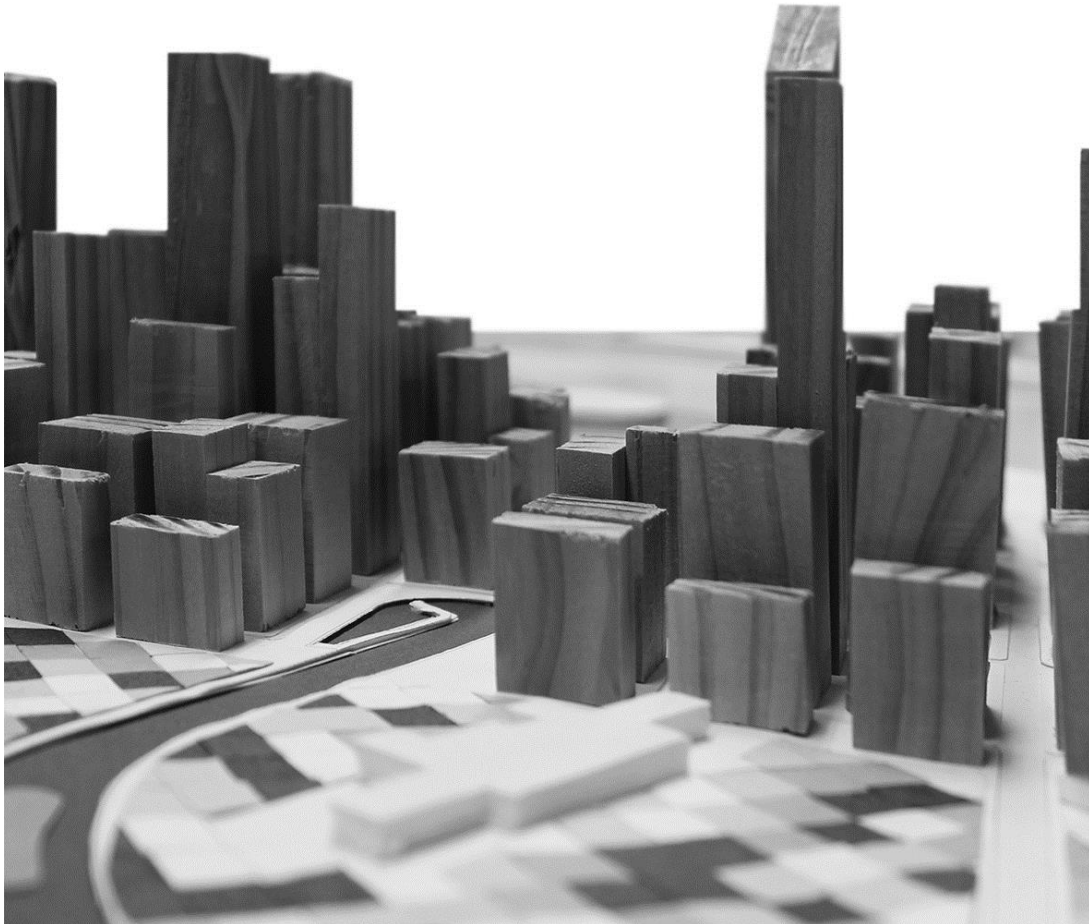
as green areas, parking space but also as a commercial ground floor, again a possible inner path for winter times.

Fig 10. Proposed variations on the Stalin era blocks



Finally the proposal by José Luís Carratalá Rico, Elisabeth Ferrando Ferrando and Carlos Sanjuan Martínez (2.5.7) works on a different scenario. Minsk is the central city of Belarus and it is absorbing most of the potential of the country. That is why they believe that in a near future the city will need a real central business area and maybe Liahovka could be the location for it as a result of its central position in the city. So they provide a new center for the country center; a “downtown” for Minsk. But they do not forget about the place where they are working with the strong presence of the green diameter. As a result of that they operate with an extremely pragmatic decision. Half of the area will be green, so an extension of the green diameter, while the other half would become a high density urban area with skyscrapers till 30 storeys high, which takes Manhattan island, and its iconic views as a clear reference (Fig 11).

Fig 11. Iconic views for the area



3. CONCLUSIONS

One of the most interesting aspects of the experience has been for the Spanish students to work in a totally different context. Mediterranean cities are compact and dense cities with an important mixture of activities and few open spaces. On the contrary the urban pattern of Minsk belongs to the Modern Movement urbanism which is characterized by considering the territory as an entire open and public space where buildings are situated [6]. Furthermore, the city has a lack of mixture of activities and maintains in its central area old industrial spaces.

Also it was interesting for the Belarusian faculties participating on this educational experience find as a result of this workshop studio a completely different approach to the Minsk urban issues. Prof. Vera Sysoyeva stated after the presentation by the students of the University of Alicante: “First of all, a certain rate of abstraction allowed the students to develop bright ideas that could hardly do local students concentrated on local restrictions. From the over hand, we were deeply impressed by the visions of Minsk identity caught by the outside observers. That concerned building and space morphology as well as the way of open space consuming. And as teachers, we found it very helpful to introduce the proposed 11 ways of urban intervention into teaching process. That could work out as a short exercise or a complete course project and give students the full scope urban practices.”

The result of the workshop, analyzed through these proposals, allows us think about the different approaches nowadays in a city. The projects should be considered just as a reflection on a certain urbanistic approaches as without knowing the real and actual planning conditions of Minsk it would not be possible to design true changes in the city.

In any case all these proposals offer a debate about the different strategies taken in account in each one. They offer independent approaches but the addition of several of them can also be considered as a mixed and compatible.

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